

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: B

Date: October 26, 2005

Topic: First Review of a Request for Approval of an Alternative Accreditation Plan from the Henrico County Public Schools for Mt. Vernon Middle School

Presenter: Mrs. Kathleen M. Smith, Director of the Office of School Improvement
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Origin:

 Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

X Board review required by

 State or federal law or regulation

X Board of Education regulation

 Other: _____

 Action requested at this meeting X Action requested at future meeting: November 30, 2005
(date)

Previous Review/Action:

X No previous board review/action

 Previous review/action
date _____

action _____

Background Information:

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* adopted by the Board in July 2000, Section 8 VAC 20-131.280.D. of the standards states:

Special purpose schools such as regional, special education, alternative, or career and technical schools that serve as the student's school of principal enrollment shall be evaluated on standards appropriate to the programs offered in the schools and approved by the Board prior to August 1 of the school year for which approval is requested. Any student graduating from a special purpose school with a Standard, Advanced Studies, or Modified Standard Diploma must meet the requirements prescribed in 8 VAC 20-131-50.

Section 22.1-253.13:1.D.8 of the *Standards of Quality* requires local school boards to provide educational alternatives for students whose needs are not met in programs prescribed elsewhere in these standards. Such students shall be counted in average daily membership (ADM) in accordance with the regulations of the Board of Education. Regulations governing programs such as this are found in the accrediting standards, which permit alternative accreditation plans and allow the Board to grant waivers to certain provisions of the standards.

In September 2004, at the board's request, the department developed a template for school divisions to use in preparing alternative accreditation plan proposals. The department also developed criteria for the evaluation of proposals. This request has been reviewed against the evaluation criteria and a copy of the department's review is attached.

Summary of Major Elements:

The school board of Henrico County is proposing an alternative accreditation plan for Mount Vernon Middle School, an alternative school that serves students grades 6-8 who are consistently functioning below grade level in reading and/or mathematics for whom no other appropriate services have been successful and who are unlikely to make up academic deficits in a traditional middle school setting. Students identified for this alternative program have failed to respond positively to the traditional schools' intervention strategies and have fallen into the at-risk category of being retained one or more years. Initial criteria for consideration in the program include failure on the 5th grade Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading, mathematics, and/or writing.

The mission of Mount Vernon Middle School is to fully prepare each individual student in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades to earn promotion to high school, access high school content and earn a standard or advanced diploma. An interdisciplinary approach will allow focused instruction in reading and mathematics enhanced by the infusion of social studies and science subject matter. Time in the program is three years; initial capacity of the school/program is 100 students. Prior to enrollment, the parent(s), student, and principal will discuss the advantages of the alternative program. Signatures of the parent(s) and the student indicate their agreement to placement at Mount Vernon Middle School.

An interdisciplinary instructional program incorporating the four major content areas is offered that includes exposure to organization and study skills and self-management for each student as specified in an Individualized Student Success plan. A vocational program is also offered. Each student completes the Stanford Achievement Test (10th edition) and/or the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments prior to entering the program to assist with the development of the student's educational plan. These assessments are also used as post-measures of student achievement. Students will be taught by highly qualified teachers and will complete rigorous work in the core subject areas of mathematics, history/social science, and English. Students are placed at a grade level according to pretest scores and a review of the student's classroom performance.

Middle grade students are determined to be ready for 9th grade when they have acquired the academic knowledge needed to pass 8th grade SOL assessments and appropriate behavioral skills. Progress indicators include quarterly gains in reading, mathematics, and writing, as well as attendance. Students at all grades will participate in SOL testing in all four content areas; however, a student must be in attendance at Mount Vernon Middle School for a minimum of four semesters, including the semester in

which testing takes place, for the scores to be included in the accreditation calculation. Four semesters of instruction in this alternative environment is needed to compensate for the academic and social deficits with which students enter this program.

All students will participate in all SOL tests for the purpose of assessing progress and meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Mount Vernon Middle School will meet the pre-accreditation requirements outlined in the Standards of Accreditation.

Henrico County Public Schools is requesting that the school be accredited on the following criterion:

- A student must be in attendance at Mount Vernon Middle School for a minimum of four semesters, including the semester in which testing takes place, for the scores to be included in the accreditation calculation. Four semesters of instruction in this alternative environment is needed to compensate for the academic and social deficits with which students enter this program. Students participating in the program for fewer than four semesters will be considered transfer students for purposes of calculating the school's state accreditation ratings. Scores of students in attendance for four semesters or more, including the semester in which testing takes place, will be included in the accreditation calculation.
- Scores for each test in each of the four content areas will be combined to create one (composite) pass rate, reflecting the interdisciplinary approach to instruction. Because of the small enrollment at the school, a composite pass rate is necessary to create a larger pool of student scores upon which to base accreditation. In order to meet accreditation requirements, the composite pass rate must be 70% for grades 6-8 combined.

Henrico County Public Schools is requesting waivers to provisions of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* from the following state standards: (Henrico County is sending an amended request prior to the September 21, 2005, meeting.)

1. 8 VAC 20-131-90.A-C.

- A. The middle school shall provide each student a program of instruction which corresponds to the Standards of Learning for English, mathematics, science, and history/social science. In addition, each school shall provide instruction in art, music, foreign language, physical education and health, and career and technical exploration.
- B. The middle school shall provide a minimum of eight courses to students in the eighth grade. Courses in English, mathematics, science, and history/social science shall be required. Four elective courses shall be available: level one of a foreign language, one in health and physical education, one in fine arts, and one in career and technical exploration.
- C. Level one of a foreign language shall be available to all eighth grade students. For any high school credit-bearing course taken in middle school, parents may request that grades be omitted from the student's transcript and the student not earn high school credit for the course in accordance with policies adopted by the local school board. Notice of this provision must be provided to parents with a deadline and format for making such a request. Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent a middle school from offering any other credit-bearing courses for graduation.

2. 8 VAC 20-131-300 C.1.

Fully accredited. A school will be rated Fully Accredited when its eligible students meet the pass rate of 70% in each of the four core content areas.

3. 8 VAC 20-131-280 E.5.

All students who transfer within a school division shall have their scores counted in the calculation of the school's accountability (accreditation) rating. Students who transfer into a Virginia school from another Virginia school division, another state, or another country, in kindergarten through grade eight shall be expected to take all applicable SOL tests or other additional tests approved by the Board as outlined in 8 VAC 20-131-110.B. of these regulations. If the transfer takes place after the 20th instructional day following the opening of school, the scores on these tests may be used in calculating school accountability (accreditation) ratings.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education accept for first review the request for approval of an alternative accreditation plan from Henrico County Public Schools for Mount Vernon Middle School.

Impact on Resources: There is no impact on the resources of the Department of Education.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: This item will be presented to the Board of Education for final review at its meeting on November 30, 2005.

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA**

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF AN ALTERNATIVE ACCREDITATION PLAN

Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, (8 VAC 20-131-10 et. seq.) set the minimum standards public schools must meet to be accredited by the Board of Education. Accreditation of public schools is required by the Standards of Quality (22.1-253.13:1 et. seq.). The annual accrediting cycle for public schools is July 1 through June 30. This cover sheet, with the supporting documentation, must be submitted to the Department of Education for review and recommendation to the Board at least 90 days prior to August 1 of the school year in which the plan is to be implemented.

8 VAC 20-131-280 of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* states (in part): *Special purpose schools such as regional, special education, alternative, or career and technical schools that serve as the student's school of principal enrollment shall be evaluated on standards appropriate to the programs offered in the school and approved by the Board prior to August 1 of the school year for which approval is requested. Any student graduating from a special purpose school with a Standard, Advanced Studies, or Modified Standard Diploma must meet the requirements prescribed in 8 VAC 20-131-50.*

The Board of Education, in its *Guidelines Governing the Implementation of Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, states:

Schools described in this section are those that serve as a student's school of principal enrollment and where students are reported in fall membership for the school. Fall membership determines whether or not these schools are subject to the provisions of the accrediting standards; therefore, schools reporting fall membership are subject to the provisions of the standards. These schools may or may not administer Standards of Learning (SOL) tests.

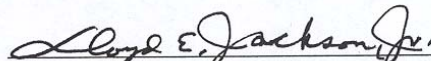
In accordance with the provisions of 8 VAC 20-131-330 of the standards, local school boards may seek waivers of provisions of the standards to address the unique needs of these special purpose schools. Such requests may include an alternative accreditation plan. Applications must be submitted to the Board for consideration at least ninety days prior to August 1 of the school year. Requests for consideration must be accompanied by information that documents the need for approval of the request.

We, the undersigned, submit this request for review and approval by the Board of Education and understand that we are expected to appear before the Board to discuss the program and respond to questions raised.

8/25/05

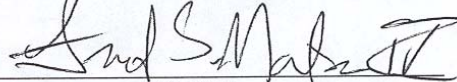
Date Approved
by the Local School Board

Submission Date



Signature

Chairman of the School Board



Signature

Division Superintendent

Request for Approval of Mount Vernon Middle School, Henrico County Public Schools, as an Alternative Program for Underachieving Middle Grade Students

Intent: To fully prepare each individual student in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades who is significantly behind in academic and behavioral fundamentals to successfully access high school content and earn a standard or advanced diploma (not just pass 8th grade SOL tests).

Vision/Mission: Mount Vernon is an educational environment where certain students who have not experienced academic success in a comprehensive elementary or middle school setting, and who have been referred by their home schools, can develop the academic and personal skills and habits that will prepare them for success in high school.

Mt. Vernon exposes students to a safe and stimulating alternative learning environment where they will grow academically through an exposure to interdisciplinary instruction. An interdisciplinary approach will allow focused instruction in reading and math enhanced by the infusion of social studies and science subject matter. Time in the program is three years; initial capacity of the school/program is 100 students.

Target Population: HCPS students aged 11 through 15 and grades 6-8 who are consistently functioning below grade level in reading and/or mathematics for whom no other appropriate services have been successful and who are unlikely to make up academic deficits in a traditional middle school setting. Students identified for our alternative programs have failed to respond positively to the traditional schools' intervention strategies and have fallen into the at-risk category of being retained one or more years. Initial criteria for consideration in the program include failure on the 5th grade SOL tests in reading, mathematics, and/or writing.

Student selection indicators:

- The type of instructional strategies needed to foster student achievement cannot be accommodated in a traditional setting.
- Academic performance is low or declining and the student is at risk of being retained. The student may have failed one or more SOL or local criterion-referenced tests.
- The student's behavior management needs are beyond the scope of programming that exists at any of our comprehensive schools.
- A series of in-school, short-, and long-term suspensions has not effectively modified the student's behavior.
- The student's behavior negatively affects the learning environment of others and impedes the teaching-learning process.
- Prior to enrollment, the parent(s), student, and principal will discuss the advantages of the alternative program. Signatures of the parent(s) and the student indicate their agreement to placement at Mt. Vernon.

Program of Instruction:

- An interdisciplinary instructional program incorporating the four major content areas will be offered that includes exposure to organization and study skills and self-management for each student as specified in an Individualized Student Success plan.
- A vocational program will be offered:
 - ✓ Career and Technical Occupational Exploration, which is designed to help students explore career options, design/build products following a design brief, work in teams to accomplish course objectives, explore occupational areas and education programs for Career and Technical Education within the 16 career families.
 - ✓ This course will focus on an awareness of the relationship between technology and science, with a focus on the nature of science and how it is applied. It will involve strong integration of reading, writing, and math skills. Interdisciplinary topics to be included are technology, biotechnology, transportation systems, communication systems, alternative energy, aerospace/flight, and manufacturing.
 - ✓ Those students who participate in these vocational experiences will be well prepared to take advantage of similar opportunities at the high school level, at either of the school division's technical centers or at Virginia Randolph Community High School.
- Students will complete the Stanford Achievement Test (10th edition) and the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments prior to entering the program to assist with the development of the student's educational plan. These assessments will also be used as post-measures of student achievement.
- Individual course schedules will be designed to assist students to achieve their highest potential.
- Students will be taught by highly qualified teachers and will complete rigorous work in the core subject areas of math, science, social studies, and English.
- Students will experience an interdisciplinary exposure to core content subject matter.
- Developing skills in social studies and science also will be accomplished through interdisciplinary selections for reading and writing instruction through the use of Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop.
- Applied instructional methods and experiences, which will involve partnerships with local universities, businesses, and museums, will be utilized to facilitate learning in the core content areas.
- Budgeted PTR is 17:1; with added resources, the actual PTR is 12:1 to better serve the students at this school.
- Student support services will include a focus on self-management and adjustment skills. The 8th grade Health Standards of Learning will serve as the foundation of curriculum and counseling in self-management as well as the Life Skills curriculum.
- Physical activities will be incorporated daily.
- Career exploration, in addition to the vocational offerings, will be provided through the use of ACT's *Explore*, interest and aptitude inventories that each student will take and be counseled on the results, for the purpose of planning a high school course of study. In addition, Career Days will be held at the school periodically throughout the school year.

Student Assessment/Evaluation:

Academic Achievement:

- Each student will be diagnostically pre-tested prior to program entry in reading and mathematics using the Stanford Achievement Test (10th edition) and the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments. The Stanford 10 Reading test assesses word study skills, vocabulary, and comprehension, whereas the Mathematics test evaluates problem-solving and procedural skills. The DRP assessment is used to collect information on student reading comprehension. Results from these pretests will be used to determine the individualized instruction each student subsequently receives.
- A student will be placed at a grade level according to pretest scores and a review of the student's classroom performance.
- Students at all grades will participate in SOL testing in all four content areas; however, a student must be in attendance at Mt. Vernon for a minimum of four semesters, including the semester in which testing takes place, for the scores to be included in the accreditation calculation. Four semesters of instruction in this alternative environment is needed to compensate for the academic and social deficits with which students enter this program.
- Posttests will be administered to monitor student progress. Students will be tested at specific intervals throughout and at the end of the academic year (and at the end of summer session if included) to document academic progress and determine content for the next instructional period.

Study Skills/Self-Management/Leadership: Teachers will monitor student use of specifically taught skills, such as note taking and organizational management, on an ongoing basis. Behavioral indicators such as attendance and discipline will be the topic of quarterly individual meetings with each student.

Progress and Exit Criteria: Students will be determined to be ready for 9th grade when they have acquired the academic knowledge needed to pass 8th grade SOL assessments, and appropriate behavioral skills. Progress indicators will include quarterly gains in reading, mathematics, and writing, as well as attendance.

Basis for Accreditation and Adequate Yearly Progress:

- Mt. Vernon Middle School will meet the pre-accreditation requirements outlined in the Standards of Accreditation.
- Scores for each test in each of the four content areas will be combined to create one (composite) pass rate, reflecting the interdisciplinary approach to instruction. Because of the small enrollment at the school, a composite pass rate is necessary to create a larger pool of student scores upon which to base accreditation. In order to meet accreditation requirements, the pass rate must be 70% for Grades 6-8 combined. Students participating in the Mt. Vernon program for less than four semesters will be considered transfer students for purposes of calculating the school's state accreditation ratings. Scores of students in attendance for four semesters or more, including the semester in which testing takes place, will be included in the accreditation calculation.

- Students will participate in all tests at all three grades for the purpose of assessing progress and meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, but results may not count toward the school's state accreditation rating.

Waivers Requested: Mount Vernon Middle School will require waivers from the following state standards:

- Required middle school electives (foreign language). (8 VAC 20-131-90 A-C)
- Meeting the required pass rate in each of the four core content areas. (8 VAC 20-131-300 C)
- Counting the scores of transfer students from within the school division. (8 VAC 20-131-280 E.5)

These students receive instruction in non-core areas such as the arts throughout their elementary and middle school experiences and will again when they return to a traditional school setting. Mt. Vernon is designed to focus on significant interventions in the fundamentals to equip the students to succeed in high school when without such dramatic interventions they would not succeed.

Transition Process: Staff members at Mount Vernon will work with the receiving school to select teachers in advance of students' transition to another environment. Meetings will be held with the receiving teachers to establish a transition plan for each student.

Program Evaluation: The progress of students promoted from the program, as well as those who do not successfully complete it, will be monitored throughout high school. This process will include monitoring grades and test results as well as attendance and discipline histories. Former students will also be interviewed periodically during their 9th and 10th grades by their instructors from Mount Vernon in order to make program improvements and refinements. Additionally, inquiry sessions will be held during the year with students and parents to monitor program effectiveness.

Virginia Department of Education
Evaluation Criteria
Mount Vernon Middle School, Henrico County Public Schools
Alternative Accreditation Plans for Special Purpose Schools

Criteria	Yes	No	Limited
School characteristics and instructional program:			
1. The mission, purpose, and target population of the school justify its categorization as a “special purpose” school and, therefore, eligible to request an alternative accreditation plan.	√		
2. The characteristics and special needs of the student population are clearly defined, and the criteria for student placement require parental consultation and agreement.	√		
3. The program of instruction provides all students with opportunities to study a comprehensive curriculum that is customized to support the mission of the school.			√
4. The school provides transition planning to help students be successful when they return to a regular school setting.	√		
5. Strategies used to evaluate student progress are aligned to the mission/purpose of the school and include academic achievement measures.			√
6. Convincing evidence has been provided that students enrolled in the school have not been successful in other schools subject to all the accrediting standards.	√		
7. Students will be taught with highly qualified teachers who meet the Board of Education’s licensure requirements for instructional personnel.	√		
Alternative Accreditation Plan:			
1. Rationale and evidence provide convincing evidence that the “special purpose” nature of the school precludes its being able to reach and maintain full accreditation status as defined in the SOA.	√		
2. Alternative accreditation criteria described in the plan include academic achievement measures that are objective, measurable, and directly related to the mission and purpose of the school.			√
3. The plan includes use of statewide assessment student achievement results of English and mathematics.	√		
4. The plan meets the testing requirements of the SOA.	√		

Criteria	Yes	No	Limited
5. The plan meets the testing requirements of NCLB and describes how the school plans to meet “adequate yearly progress” requirements of the federal law.			√
6. The plan provides convincing evidence that all pre-accreditation eligibility criteria are met for standards in which waivers have not been requested.			√
7. Waivers have been requested for accrediting standards that are not being met, and the rationale for the waivers are clear and appropriate for the mission/purpose of the school.		√	